

STUDIES IN PSALMS

PSALM 11

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Faith's Brave Answer to the Counsels of Fear.

ANALYSIS

Stanza, vers. 1-3, Counsels of Despair, with an Expression of Surprise Refused. Antistanza, vers. 4-6, Confidence in Jehovah Triumphantly Affirmed. Refrain, ver. 7, The Righteous are Sure of Jehovah's Love and Long to Behold his Face.

(Lm.)¹ By David.

- 1 In Jehovah have I taken refuge:
how say ye to my soul,—²
"Flee to a mountain like³ a bird;
- 2 for lo! the lawless ones are treading the bow,
they have fixed their arrow on the string,—
to shoot in darkness at such as are upright in heart:—
- 3 When the buttresses are being torn down,⁴
what can a righteous man do?"⁵
- 4 Jehovah is in his holy temple,—
as for Jehovah in the heavens is his throne:
His eyes behold the earth,⁶
his eyelids try the sons of men:
- 5 Jehovah trieth a righteous man,
but a lawless man and one who loveth violence his soul
hateth:
- 6 Let him rain on such as are lawless live coals,⁷
fire and brimstone and a burning wind are the portion of
their cup.

1. Some cod. (w. Sep., Vul.): "Psalm"—Gn.

2. See Intro., Chap. III., "Soul."

3. So it shd. be (w. Aram., Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.

4. So Dr.

5. Or: "what hath a righteous man (ever) done?"

6. "The poor"—Sep. and Vul. Br. prefers "world" (w. Theodotion).

7. So Gt. (*peham*, instead of *pahim*, "bird traps," "snares.") Del. prefers "snares"—lightnings; "for the lightning that flashes from one point of the heavens and darts with a serpentine motion towards another may really be compared to a snare or noose that is thrown down from above."

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7 For righteous is Jehovah righteous acts he loveth
an upright one shall have vision of his face.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician. (CMm.) For the male choir.

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 11

How dare you tell me, "Flee¹ to the mountains for safety," when I am trusting in the Lord?

2 For the wicked have strung their bows, drawn their arrows tight against the bowstrings, and aimed from ambush at the people of God.

3 "Law and order have collapsed,"² we are told. "What can the righteous do but flee?"

4 But the Lord is still in His holy temple; He still rules from heaven. He closely watches everything that happens here on earth.

5 He puts the righteous and the wicked to the test; He hates those loving violence.

6 He will rain down fire and brimstone on the wicked and scorch them with His burning wind.

7 For God is good, and He loves goodness; the godly shall see His face.³

EXPOSITION

It will be seen from the analysis that the structure of this psalm is of the simplest—a stanza, an antistanza, and a refrain. The first point of advantage, is to notice, that the timid advice beginning, *Flee to a mountain*, runs on to the end of the stanza: to see this, is to perceive what an evil case the psalmist's advisers consider he is in. He is as helpless as a little *bird* watched by *archers in ambush*—instant *flight* is his only hope of personal safety: and, as for public reasons for remaining at his post, they are gone: further resistance is useless, seeing that *the buttresses* of public justice and social order are one by one being torn down; and, with no redress available, what has a righteous man ever done under such circumstances or can he now hope to do? Such are the counsels of despair offered by the psalmist's timid friends,

1. Literally, "Flee as a bird."

2. Literally, "If the foundations have been torn down."

3. Or, "His face shines down in mercy and joy upon the good."

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—counsels which the psalmist's faith in Jehovah emboldens him to reject, with surprise that they should have been offered him.

Of the two sets of circumstances in which such advice might have been tendered to David—while he was at the court of Saul, and when the revolt of Absalom was coming to a head—the former seems the more probable, while his faith was yet undimmed and he was a stranger to distrust and vacillation.

It is well that, thus early, the heavenly *temple* should be near to the psalmist's faith. *Jehovah is in his holy temple* above, with his mighty hosts waiting to do his will. With stronger emphasis and greater explicitness, the psalmist repeats, *As for Jehovah, in the heavens is his throne*. The distance does not obstruct his vision, *His eyes behold the earth*. He is intently watching the conduct of the lawless men. *His eyelids*—fixed for steadfast gaze and narrow scrutiny—*test* the quality, course and tendency of the actions of *the sons of men*. He may delay the deliverance of *the righteous man*, but he is only *putting him to the test*; whereas *the lawless man* he hates with all the intensity of his holy affections. He has judgment in store for all such: like as when he overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah! The language may be figurative, but the faith is sublime; and it keeps the persecuted hero at his post. Note also the course of instruction through which the psalm conducts us. The sight of Jehovah's throne in the heavens brings Jehovah himself all the nearer to the persecuted believer's extremity. Heaven is equally near to every scene of trial on earth. For the present, indeed we have need to localise Jehovah's presence; and in any case we must not lose hold of his personality. He is a God who hates, who loves; and the more we are assured that it is he who makes us *righteous*, the more shall we long for the beatific vision of his face.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What a grand example of complete reliance on God does David present! Is it ever the will of God to "flee to the mountains"? Discuss.
2. When the foundations of Democratic society are being torn down what can the righteous do? Discuss.
3. In what sense can we say God sees all and knows all? Does what He sees move Him to action?—what about God when 6 million Jews were being burned?

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4. Discuss David's areas of life in which this psalm might have application.
5. When we see Him "face to face" the dark things will be made plain—the inexplicable circumstances of life will have the easiest of explanations. Discuss a child-parent-teacher-student-relationship in which this is presently true—you might add scientist-layman.

PSALM 12

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

General Corruption, Evidenced by Sin of the Tongue,
Impels to Prayer and Calls Forth a Divine Answer.

ANALYSIS

In Stanzas I. and II. (vers. 1-4), the Petitioner Describes the Prevalent Sins of the Tongue, and Prays for the Excision of the Offenders. In Stanzas III. and IV. (vers. 5-8), Jehovah's Answer is Announced and Amplified.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1¹ Oh save Jehovah! for the man of kindness is no more,
for the faithful have ceased from among the sons of men:¹
- 2 Unreality speak they every one with² his neighbour,
with a flattering lip and a double mind do they speak.
- 3 May Jehovah cut off all flattering lips,
the tongue that speaketh great things:
- 4 Them who have said "To our tongues we give strength,
our lips are with us, who is our master?"
- 5 "Because of the spoiling of humbled ones because of the
sighing of needy ones
now will I arise" saith Jehovah:
"I will place him in safety who panteth for it."³—
- 6 The promises of Jehovah are promises that are pure,
silver smelted down in a furnace to the ground⁴—
refined seven times.

1. Cp. Isa. 57:1, 2, Mi. 7:2.

2. Some cod. (w. L ear. pr. ed., Sep., Vul.): "unto"—Gn.

3. "I will shine forth for him"—Br.

4. So Del. and similarly Dr. But Br. reads and renders the verse:
"When thrust down to the earth he shall be purified seven times."